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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000630

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2019
TAGS: [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#) [MASS](#)
SUBJECT: RED CROSS HEAD VOICES CONCERN OVER HOSTAGES

REF: A. MANILA 572-MILITARY OPERATION AGAINST HOSTAGE
TAKERS
[1](#)B. MANILA 247-KIDNAPPED RED CROSS WORKERS BEGIN
FOURTH WEEK WITH TERRORISTS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met March 20 with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Head of Delegation Jean-Daniel Tauxe to discuss the tense situation surrounding the three ICRC hostages kidnapped January 15 by the Abu Sayyaf Group on Jolo island (ref B). Tauxe assured the Ambassador that he knew that recent military actions by the Armed Forces of the Philippines against the suspected hostage takers on Jolo had not been at the suggestion of U.S. personnel, as Philippine media had reported. The Ambassador emphasized to Tauxe that U.S. military on Jolo were operating strictly in a logistical and intelligence support role, and were not advocating any course of action that might endanger the ICRC hostages. The Ambassador also underscored the USG's strong interest in seeing the hostage situation resolved peacefully and that U.S. assets were available to immediately transport the hostages out of the area if they were released. End Summary.

"DISASTROUS WEEK"

[1](#)2. C) Tauxe confided to the Ambassador that it had been a "disastrous week" for his office. He had been very concerned for the hostages' safety after an encounter between Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and elements of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) on March 16 (ref A). Combined Philippine forces fought with followers of Albader Parad, the ASG leader suspected of masterminding the ICRC kidnappings. Parad was wounded in the skirmish, and numerous casualties were reported among the AFP and ASG. Nevertheless, Parad and his core group evaded capture and managed to escape with the hostages. In response to concerns that the hostage takers might react to tight military cordons with violence against the three ICRC hostages, the AFP has pulled back their forces, but not disengaged completely. In reviewing the military's actions, the Ambassador and Tauxe discussed how the complicated social fabric of Jolo works to the advantage of the ASG. Enmeshed in the Jolo populace through familial ties, business connections, and political alliances, the ASG has relationships throughout society that hinder the military's ability to apprehend members of the organization.

FRAGMENTED GOVERNMENT EFFORT

13. (C) The Philippine government repeatedly has stressed its firm commitment to ensuring the safety of the ICRC hostages, but their plight is exacerbated by lack of a cohesive approach among various official interlocutors in the negotiation effort. On Jolo island, Governor Sakur Tan -- who does not control military forces -- and Major General Juancho Sabban, the Philippine task force commander, both have inserted themselves in the negotiations. At the national level, Senator Richard Gordon and Secretary of the Interior Ronaldo Puno -- both adept politicians and potential presidential candidates for 2010 -- have been involved separately in the negotiations. However, Puno has used his access to the President to influence the Administration's position on the negotiations to this point. Puno also has enlisted Moro National Liberation Front chairman Nur Misuari, a skilled but inconsistent political figure, as a middleman on Jolo island. The mixed messages coming from the various government actors have not facilitated a single set of conditions being presented by Parad for release of the ICRC hostages.

URGING NO RANSOM

14. (C) Tauxe reiterated the ICRC's "no ransom" policy on kidnappings, but lamented that the Philippine government's uncoordinated efforts in the negotiations had confused the

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hostage takers to the point that no specific demands had been made, and the situation was only getting more dangerous. The Ambassador noted that the scenario was compounded by the reality that in previous incidents, ransom money has been paid to the ASG by private parties. These payments have reinforced the impression among Filipinos -- whether accurate or not -- that some countries, including the Italians, accede to ransom demands. The Ambassador said that in her meeting with Secretary Puno earlier in the day, she had emphasized to Puno the necessity to secure the safe release of the ICRC hostages without paying any ransom.

15. (C) Commenting on Tauxe's complaint that there were too many players involved in the negotiations, the Ambassador told Tauxe that in her conversations with Secretary Puno, she had suggested that the government's fragmented approach to the kidnapping was not leading to resolution and that designating a single point of contact for negotiations and a single commander of involved forces would be a better option.

The Ambassador had emphasized to Puno that the confusion worked in favor of the kidnappers. Tauxe said he agreed and thanked the Ambassador for her efforts and the offers of medical and transport assistance should be the hostages be released.

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